

# The Arizona Law and U.S. Journalism

*Understanding the Hostility of the Mainstream Media*

BY RICHARD PELTO

**T**he passage of Arizona's immigration law has either provided insight to what is desperately wrong with journalism...or has fittingly revealed why it needs resurrection as an ideal.

This country's most lauded attribute is that it is "democratic," and journalism has been touted as its most important "leg." There is also misguided pride in the fact that journalism has evolved for the better throughout this country's history. Initially there was the "political" press that now elicits scorn because of its slavish adherence to political party manipulation of public opinion. Then journalism morphed into a sensationalistic "yellow" realm in order to maximize its media power that came with being essentially an only source of perspective.

But journalism today has further evolved from reporters journalistically striving to "objectively" provide the five w's and h by grilling policemen and politicians to what now exists: newspaper employees who act more as secretaries who obediently transmit whatever the easily accessible official press release states.

James Fallows, in the June 2010 *Atlantic* magazine, quotes the "astonishment" of a colleague when he assessed present-day journalism as "predictable and pack-like" in its responses to events. The source adds, "Once something has been observed, nearly everyone says approximately the same thing." Fallows then comments: "Rather, their conventions and instincts made them all emphasize the same things." What Fallows fails to mention — because it puts journalism into too negative a light — is that journalism today is press-release journalism, and journalists are just part

of a conveyor belt of information. Thus all the media helped orchestrate and uncritically facilitate the administration and Defense Department's ubiquitous repetition of "weeeapons of masssss deestruction" mantra emphasizing threat and necessity of action prior to the invasion of Iraq. The same applied to the "inevitable dominoes dropping" mantra that preceded our involvement in Vietnam. Amazingly, this even occurred despite weap-



ons inspectors' denial of evidence, and, even when a pitiful picture of something looking like a slightly enlarged play rocket was presented as pictorial evidence, it was confidently reported that here was hard evidence. After the invasion, the "rocket" was

found, and buried in the reporting of that find was the fact that this object might have flown for some feet but definitely not the thousands of miles necessary to hit the United States — something that should have been abundantly clear to any editor looking at the photo with at least some skepticism.

Journalists now are just conduits for whatever the system "authority" says, even if two authority-validated reports are contradictory — for example, an Air Force authority emphasizing a "missile gap" and a Navy one downplaying its relevance. Insistently and repetitiously reporting a missile gap facilitates public spending, and feeds ambitious greed. The recent "Great Recession" resulted from the repetition that de-regulation is *the* pathway to endless wealth.

Fallows writes that information must not be "uninteresting, inaccurate, or untimely." The first quality

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results in endlessly reporting the minutiae involving Hollywood characters and sports figures, the second results in only reporting what “authorities” declare, and timeliness only seems to gain some importance after the fact.

One must ask, what about reporting what is crucial?

For example, it may now be after-the-fact prescient to wonder if funneling extremely inflammable materials like methane from deep in the ocean might create risks that could result in a catastrophic ecological disaster. And it is less likely that a journalist would even think about what drives oil companies to spend ever more lavishly trying to get consistently less-productive sources of energy around the world, let alone making clear the consequences that must come with realization that all resources are limited in availability.



**Atlantic National Correspondent James Fallows**

And rather than just report that the Arizona law is “misguided,” attempt to find out just what caused such a build-up of factors that necessitated its politicians to challenge “political correctness.” Little journalistic thought is given that doing so may reveal crucial concerns. So, historically, journalism strives to compete for media money with television’s propaganda-enabling sound bites while trying desperately to hold onto the kind of power and largesse that enabled such hallmarks as an iconic Hearst “castle.” And rather than resist the magnetism of systemic money and power, it now desperately seeks any source of revenue.

For political reasons what is important is ignored

by the establishment system. First, that a peculiar marriage has arisen between corporate America and rapidly growing ethnocentric interests in seeking to enable something laughingly called “comprehensive immigration reform.” That is a formidable alliance, and thus all media outlets and the newspapers are, as noted in the Fallows article, “pack-like” in their not reporting the rationale that united this union: a need to continually pursue an assumed unlimited growth by the corporations, and a need to legalize as many illegal immigrants as possible by the ethnic interests. This fact is what allows them to either downplay or systemically ignore the numerous costs of absorbing, infrastructurally and socially, the millions of people who can barely speak the language and large numbers of whom have less than an eighth-grade education. The corporate interests do have a conditioned-reflex appreciation for having endless access to cheap labor, while the ethnocentric interests’ power comes through their rapid numerical growth. Thus both enthusiastically support *rewarding* illegal and legal immigration while providing lip-service cant for a “secure” border, something that conveniently always remains porous, given their continuous push for legislative illegal-immigrant rewards, either delivered or promised, and their resistance to what they call punitive anti-immigrant measures that might restrict the immigration tap water flow into the bathtub of America. This combined power of these two forces now creates the systemic need that results in journalism’s “pack-like” reports, and enables it to ignore the obvious question of how you secure a border when you are actively providing rewards for overcoming whatever “security” is there.

The Arizona law came into being because it represented the widespread concern of that state’s citizens for the broad spectrum of costs so many are forced to bear in order to accommodate the change created by unsustainably absorbing millions of illegal and legal immigrants. The conditioned reflex reactions to the law made clear that journalism today has no relation to this country’s legacy of democratic idealism. Editorialists and reporters were quick to unquestioningly pass on the indictments of the law by the secretary of Homeland Security, the attorney general, and the president, even after the former two had to admit they had not even bothered to read the law before declaring judgment on it.

James Fallows is a person who desperately wants journalism to live up to its ideals, so he confidently writes “of course people will end up paying in some form (for a revival of journalism).” He has a long history of making clear how people should value access to

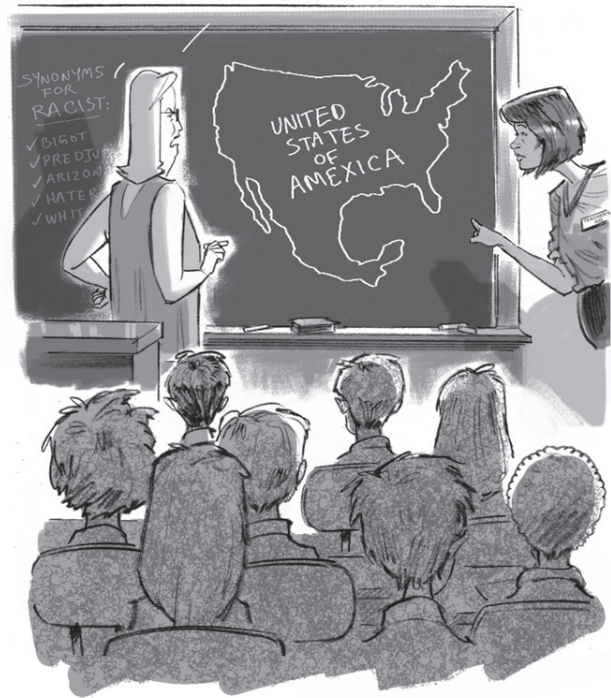
whatever allows a multi-cultural globalization to exist. Somehow in his adherence to this hope he fails to see signs of its failure, like ignoring the political greasing of the wheels that drives the inexorable systemic machine, even when it reveals journalism's shortcomings. The various policies that Fallows values—lightweight regulation, easily accessible money, the unwritten Chinese-American economic alliance, the promotion of home-ownership, endless pursuit of expanding markets—are enabled and promoted by the laissez-faire pursuit of capitalistic growth. Of course, these are attributes that almost drove our society over a cliff in 2008, and now have us teetering on another brink because conditions remain essentially unchanged despite the trillions in debt the initial problem's "solution" would require. Even though some tendencies are traditionally associated with Democrats and some with Republicans, what benefits the financial sector continues to have priority. Policy changes that might have forestalled the crisis but would have limited the financial sector's profits were ignored or swept aside, and continue despite the many-faceted promises of Obama "change."

Fallows confidently decrees in his article that what has journalistic "significance" is that which provides "reports from people who are paid to keep track of government agencies, go into danger zones, investigate and analyze public and private abuse, and generally serve as systemic rather than ad hoc observers." In a recent political campaign it was kosher to ask "Where's the beef?" in order to make clear that political promises were bereft of reality. One must ask Fallows "where is your understanding of systemic failure?" Or your evidence of journalism's ability to even see the symptoms of industrial unsustainability? Someone with his journalistic pedigree should now see that a system that ignores the fact that our systemic industrial world depends on resources that are limited in availability, and that our lives are dependent on the existence of a complex, inter-related ecology, is one that overfills our "bathtub" existence. Crucial reporting is that which helps us understand what provides continuity and sustainability. Instead he adheres to the cant of "technological" and "Google" advances bringing prosperity and an assumed unlimited growth,

and an assumed revival of journalism. One guaranteed to resume the pack-like emphasis of a failed journalism.

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So maybe it *is* a little premature. I can dream, can't I?

The moderator of *Meet the Press* repetitiously repeated that "comprehensive" reform is necessary as an antidote to an Arizona law on a Sunday, while ignoring that the law is like an explosive methane bubble of change rising from the depths. One that requires his understanding the potential consequences of its processes, while his repeating this "comprehensive" mantra only guarantees ignoring those consequences.

At the least, fellow journalist Fallows should realize that journalism must now become aware of what is viscerally being done in covering Arizona's immigration law — that it is what is making journalism irrelevant to more and more people. Realizing this must come before journalism can even hope to provide "value" to U.S. citizenry, let alone live up to the ideals of being a pivotal part of democratic vitality. ■